DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 240 620 CS 504 327

AUTHOR Bybee, Carl R.
TITLE Uses and Gratifications Research and the Study of Social Change.
PUB DATE May 83
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (33rd, Dallas, TX, May 26-30, 1983).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audience Participation; Audiences; *Mass Media Effects; *Media Research; Models; Personal Autonomy; Political Power; Research Needs; Research Problems; *Speech Communication; *Theories
IDENTIFIERS *Audience Response; *Uses and Gratifications Research

ABSTRACT

The uses and gratifications paradigm, like the initial conceptions of media effects, can be viewed as a compatible elaboration of contemporary social and political theory. The fundamental assumptions of the uses and gratifications approach, particularly the assumptions regarding the nature and extent of audience activity and the ability of the audience to recognize and act in their own best interest, implicitly bind the approach to a limited conception of the distribution and maintenance of political power. Just as the strictly behavioral orientation of the pluralist theory promotes an overly narrow conception of the exercise of power, so the behavioral orientation of the uses and gratifications paradigm, by placing so much faith in the audience's ability to self-report the immediate as well as larger implications of their media orientations, over-emphasizes the degree of audience autonomy. If the uses and gratifications paradigm is to truly reflect the audience's media experience, it must reject the optimistic and simplistic notion that an active audience implies a powerful audience. (HOD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED240620

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS RESEARCH AND THE STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Carl R. Bybee
Communication Research Center
Department of Speech
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

Paper presented to the Mass Communication Division of the International Communication Association, Dallas, Texas, May 1983.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Carl R. Bybee

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 504 327

The uses and gratifications approach has been hailed as a dramatic break not just from the mass media effects tradition of the past, but specifically from the conservative commercial and governmental influences which have constrained much of the thinking about media's role in society (Swanson, 1979). In this view, the uses and gratifications approach conceptually relocates, a certain degree of autonomous power, power which until recently was seen as resting solely in the domain of the communicator, into the hands (and minds) of the audience. Consequently, the cornerstone of the approach is the optimistic conceptualization of the audience as active: consciously using the media to satisfy personal needs and achieve personal goals. From a political perspective, by crediting people with more control over their own activities, "there is less reason to be concerned about the ownership and control of the media, or with the quality of the output or with any problem of long-term or short-term effect" (Elliot, 1974). This paper takes the position that the fundamental assumptions of the uses and gratifications approach, particularly the assumptions regarding the nature and extent of audience activity and the ability of the audience to consciously recognize and act in their own best interest, implicitly bind the approach to a limited conceptualization of the distribution and maintenance of political power.

Although there is substantial confusion and debate about the meaning of key concepts (Swanson, 1977, 1978) and whether or not the approach meets the criteria of an emerging theoretical orientation (Weiss, 1976; Elliot, 1974; Katz, 1978), or needs to (Blumler, 1979; Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1974), a consensus seems to have evolved regarding the parameters of what might loosely be called a uses and gratifications paradigm (Blumler, 1979; McLeod and Becker, 1981; Windahl, 1981). This paper will offer a critique

of that paradigm from a political communication perspective. Political communication is defined here to be a concern for the role of communication exchange in the promotion, maintenance and distribution of political power. Three related points will be made. The first is that the uses and gratifications paradigm does not represent a dramatic break, at the individual or systems level, with the traditional effects perspective, particularly in terms of its implicit conservative bias regarding the process by which political power is distributed in society. The second point is that this conservative bias can best be understood by examining the conceptual linkages of the uses and gratifications paradigm with the theory of democratic pluralism articulated by Dahl (1969) and Polsby (1963) rather than by reviewing the "peculiar" (Elliot, 1974) functionalist roots (functionalist as represented by the work of Merton (1957)) so often defensively re-sifted by supporters of the paradigm (McLeod and Becker, 1981; Mendelsohn, 1974; Katz, 1979).

The third point is derived from an analysis of political participation and power relationships presented by Lukes (1974). Working from a political communication perspective, the potential meaning of the active audience is greatly expanded, resulting in a different context for the interpretation of audience activity and inactivity. Audience members seeking diversion, escape and relaxation from the mass media can be read, for instance, as citizens, in part seeking non-involvement in the social and political process. To the extent these motivations are widely experienced within the disadvantaged sectors of society, a disturbing paradox emerges. Those citizens to whom the society offers the least, make the fewest demands on the society. Murdock and Golding (1979) phrase the issue similarly, stating that the central problem in mass communication studies, particularly of a sociological

orientation, should be "explaining how radical inequalities in the distribution of rewards come to be presented as natural and inevitable and are understood as such by those who benefit least from this distribution" (p.12). Lukes' (1974) analysis of power relationships provides a number of key insights into this paradox. The explanation of the implications of these insights for future research and theorizing within the uses and gratifications paradigm constitutes the third objective of this paper.

Dramatic Break or Evolution: The Individual Level

The history of mass communication effects research in the United States is the history of a relentless, empirical search, first for direct, powerful, short-term attitudinal effects and later for the intervening variables which could be regarded as either facilitative or obstructive of those effects. Laboratory work on the varying effectiveness of source and message characteristics, best represented by Hovland and his associates (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1954), flourished in the 1940's and 50's as the direct effects model was slowly elaborated to take account of the multi-stage process of mass communication. Early in this elaboration process, important intervening variables mediating message effectiveness, such as personality characteristics and social structural variables, were uncovered. Lazarsfeld's field studies (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954) of voting behavior, while challenging the inflated projections of media influence being obtained in the laboratory, continued to demonstrate the constraining impact of new intervening variables.

The most notable contributions of these voting studies to the growing list of media influence constraining variables were the social relations variable of group interaction -- also known as the twostep flow -- and the individual difference variables labeled selective exposure and selective per-

ception. While other earlier work is occasionally pointed to as signalling the beginning of the evolution of the uses and gratifications paradigm (Herzog, 1942; Suchman, 1942, Herzog, 1944), these studies were more concerned with the direct linking of specific media content and specific audiences to understand how individuals were integrated into the existing social structure and the forms this integration took in terms of the legitimation of power and authority (Elliot, 1974). The concern for selective exposure and selective perception, however, constituted the beginning of researchers' search for more general audience orientations toward the media. While identifying primarily defensive orientations of the audience to the media, they called explicit attention to the active, although narrowly defined, character of the audience.

The question then becomes what conceptual baggage was carried along and what was left behind in the process of this transition from a communicator centered model of mass communication effects to the audience centered model represented by the uses and gratifications paradigm. What was left behind was essentially an untenable stimulus-response conception of the media effects process. What was carried along was essentially a limited conception of the media effects process, a lack of explicit social theoretical referents for the interpretation of individual level results and a consumerist frame of reference.

The limited conception of the media effects process inherent in both pre- and post-uses and gratifications paradigm work reveals itself in a number of related ways. Perhaps the most significant commonality is the truncated view of the media influence process. Both approaches focus attention on the media/audience relationship, taking media content as a given. Imbedded in

this assumption is a lack of concern for the nature of the power relationships within society that determine media output (Murdock and Golding, 1979) and for the possibility that there are multiple realities as opposed to one objective reality within which individuals live and construct meaning for their lives (Carey and Kreiling, 1974).

A third and related commonality is the nature of the methodology employed. Rooted in empiricism and advanced through the variable analytic method, both approaches have suffered from the inability to conceptualize the complexity of symbolic content contained in media messages or the complex ways in which the audience incorporates this content into their world views (Gitlin, 1978; Swanson, 1979).

These same methodological biases have also contributed to a shortsightedness in both approaches for the understanding of the larger implications of their findings. Without the methodological ability to conceptualize ideology, an organized set of ideas and values regarding the nature of the social-political world, or the theoretical referents to call attention to this methodological deficiency, the interpretive importance of key media effects, such as reinforcement, or key media gratifications sought, such as diversion, is minimized or lost. There is a strong current of resistance to the introduction of the concept of ideology into the uses and gratifications paradigm. It would seem that this is due, in part, to the threat such an introduction would pose to the assumed meaning of audience activeness. Ideology, once conceptualized, brings one to an immediate confrontation with questions of power. To talk about ideology, it is necessary to consider its pervasiveness, its sources, and its correspondence to objective reality. In light of the answers

to these questions, the reallocation of power to the audience that the paradigm presupposes might assume a somewhat hollow ring.

Resistance to the introduction of the concept of ideology may also derive from the recognition that the level of analysis is necessarily forced upward from individual level analysis, micro-functional or action-motivation, which has characterized most uses and gratifications research, to a systems level perspective. While it is true that numerous, apparent functional analyses have been applied to the mass media at the social system level (Wright, 1960, 1974; DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1982), little has been written about the role of the individual, functional or otherwise, within these systems. Specifically, the degree of individual autonomy within a systems level functional analysis has not been addressed, leaving open the question of the degree of compatibility between these system analyses and existing uses and gratifications work done at the individual level.

One last important and relatively unrecognized commonality between the communicator and audience centered approach is in their consumerist frame of reference. While a number of mass communication scholars have called attention to and documented the commercial roots of the traditional communicator centered model of media effects (McLeod and Becker, 1981; Gitlin, 1978; Blumler, 1978), less notice has been paid to the parallels between the uses and gratifications paradigm and evolving marketing philosophy. Just as contemporary marketing research is attempting to go beyond demographics to psychographics, the uses and gratifications paradigm marks the transition from demographics to audience motivations in predicting media impact. Just as audience

demand is offered in the market place as a legitimation of production whether it be of larger cars or sexually oriented television programming, so the uses and gratifications paradigm is offered as a diagnostic tool for correcting imbalances in the flow of communication as perceived by the audience. While it is true that the paradigm has been criticized for the conservative nature of its micro-functionalist view point (an argument which will be considered later), the sophistication and degree of this criticism has not approached the same level as that which has been directed toward similar audience demand models postulated, for example, by broadcasting executives in defense of current television programming practices. The broadcast executives' defense that "we give the audience what they want" is seen as a relatively vacuous argument because it doesn't answer fundamental questions such as "how does content change? How do creators know what will be popular with the audience when there is so little feedback? Why have some programs which have had a relatively small audience when first broadcast been able to build audience interest?" (Cantor, 1980).

In addition, many critics recognize the ludicrousness of suggesting that program selection is the equivalent of voting for a particular programming content. What is on the competing channels, the audience's degree of familiarity with the genre (their conditioned acceptance), etc. all challenge the idea that program selection is an example of free choice. However, these same kinds of challenges, posed by Elliot (1974) nearly ten years ago regarding the uses and gratifications paradigm, have not resurfaced in the literature. It is also interesting to note the parallels between the rhetoric of the consumer movement and those who see the uses and gratifications approach as a significant step forward in improving media policy. In both cases attention

is focused on the act of consumption rather than the act of production. Consequently, the parameters for debate about policy are implicitly set. Audience needs and expectations must be translated into marketplace language in order to be heard. Arguments based on political or social ideals, system concepts, are not relevant.

Dramatic Break or Evolution: The System Level

DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1982) do an admirable job tracing the roots of the mass society theory and its subsequent impact on theorizing about mass media effects. They, however, do not continue to trace the conceptual trajectory of this social-political theory to its decline and transition into the pluralistic perspective. An extremely brief sketch of that development and its implications for media effects research is provided here.

At the heart of mass society theory is the claim that

> industrialization brings about numerous major changes in the structure of modern society; among them are: Factory replaces family as the premier economic and productive unit; bureaucracy replaces guild as the organizing principle of work; urban areas replace traditional rural communities as the place of residence and the point of psychological contact; and rule-bound associations within the secondary groups replace the primary social ties of kin and friendship as the paramount experience of the social sphere (Wright, 1976; p.22).

The result is that mass man is cut loose from social restraints resulting in oscillation, atomization, anomie and alienation. Individuals consequently develop a sense of powerlessness and cynicism. The danger, politically speaking, is that apathy, experienced by such individuals toward the political system, may be unpredictably and irrationally transformed into destabilizing political activity (Wright, 1976; Kornhauser, 1959).

While the roots of mass society theory rest in a historical and deep-seated distrust of the masses and their supposed anti-democratic tendencies

(Wright, 1976), recent history has provided enough examples of totalitarian or near totalitarian movements (the rise of Fascism in Europe, the somewhat tamer but similar anti-democratic McCarthy phenomenon in the United States) to keep its theoretical fire burning.

However, McCarthyism was confronted and discredited by the mid-1950's, initiating, particularly in the United States, a period of relative political calm. Even the political disruptions of the Sixties, concerning civil rights and then the Vietnam war were assimilated into the political mainstream. Consequently the predictions of mass society theory, of mass politics and mass disruption were not borne out.

A central solution advanced by political scientists for this problem was the theory of democratic elitism, a modern variant of the pluralistic conception of power (Wright, 1976). The logic of their position is that

> If, as mass society theory suggests, the modern industrial democracy tends toward unstable mass political movements, and if, in this modern industrial democracy, very little political behavior of the sort is empirically manifest, then there must exist other circumstances, conditions. or social processes whose happy consequence is to make democracy relatively "safe" after all. (Wright, 1976)

The theory of democratic elitism as the explanation of political stability contains two central features (Wright, 1976). The first is that if rational elites are left alone, that is, somehow buffered from the potentially irrational demands of the masses, they will make wise decisions. The second is that the buffering mechanism involved must somehow maintain a commitment to the democratic ideal of self-government. Consequently the notion of representation is substituted for the idea of participation as the defining standard of democratic government and pluralism. The dispersial of political power among competing interest groups is offered as the explanation of the stabilizing buffer.

Of particular note to the argument being developed here is that the central feature of political theorizing since the fifties has been the explanation of stability just as the central feature of theorizing about the impact of mass communication revolved around its lack of influence and its propensity to reinforce pre-existing attitudes and norms. At first glance, it appears that the explanations presented in these two areas for stabilizing forces are incompatible. Mass communication theorists accounted for the stability by conceptually investing more power into the audiences' role in the communication exchange process. Political scientists accounted for the stability by postulating the importance of competing, representational elite groups. It will be argued below that rather than incompatible conceptions, these are mutually reinforcing explanations derived from the fundamental conception of power imbedded in the pluralistic model. In this sense, then, just as the initial conceptions of media effects were derived from and compatible with contemporary notions of social and political theory, the uses and gratifications paradigm can also be viewed as a compatible elaboration of contemporary social and political theory. This point will be developed in the next two sections.

The Conservative Bias of the Uses and Gratifications Paradigm: The Challenge of Functionalism--A Beginning and a False Start

Perhaps the most important and most consistent attack on the uses and gratifications paradigm is its alleged conservatism (McLeod and Becker, 1981; Elliot, 1974; Swanson, 1979; Carey and Kreiling, 1975). The basic argument is that the paradigm derives its terminology and has its historical roots in functionalism. Consequently the standard attack reviews arguments concerning the conservative implications of functionalism and consequently its con-

servative implications for the uses and gratifications paradigm. The position taken here is that the functionalist challenge, as it has been articulated so far, is largely an empty one which tends to obscure a more important conservative anchor. The functionalist challenge is empty, in part, due to the looseness with which functionalism has been applied to the paradigm, but more to the point, due to the special brand of functionalism which has been held up as the theoretical measure. Since the terminology problem has been considered elsewhere, (see Elliot, 1974; Swanson, 1977), it is to the second issue we direct our attention here.

In tracing the functionalist roots of the uses and gratifications paradigm, most critics as well as supporters of the uses and gratifications paradigm generally arrive at the same two sources, Merton's (1957) exposition of a paradigm for functionalist analysis and Wright's (1960) application of that paradigm to mass communication. Occasionally, Parsons (1964) is also cited as a representative of the functional approach but is then quickly discounted. Merton is typically selected as the most appropriate representative of functionalism for mass communication researchers because, as a Columbia sociologist, he exerted a substantial amount of influence over several key students with media interests (McLeod and Becker, 1981). The problem is Merton (1957) was not articulating a functional theory.

As Goode (1973) points out, Merton (1957) distinguished between a sociological orientation which indicates the "types of variables which are somehow to be taken into account" and a theory proper which specifies "determinant relationships between particular variables." Merton's often cited contribution to the development of the functional approach to the study of mass communication was a paradigm for functional analysis, not a functional theory.

To suggest that functionalist analysis is inherently a conservative approach to the analysis of social problems is partly true because as McLeod and Becker (1981) point out, change is negatively characterized as the result of dysfunctions in the social system and because, as Stinchcombe (1968) demonstrates, the impact of history can only be awkwardly handled. However, as Merton (1957), Stinchcombe (1968) and Gans (1972) demonstrate, functional analysis can be used to reveal the logic and impact of even Marxian postulates regarding power.

Functional theory, which Parsons (1964) elevated to a sophisticated level, is extremely conservative in that it is an explanation and rationalization of the need for social, political, and economic inequality. Parsonian functionalism is a justification of the concentration of wealth and power and an attack on the logic of participatory democracy. Curiously, the uses and gratifications literature is relatively free of references to this work - work which may have proved somewhat distasteful to the social reform attitudes of many researchers working within the uses and gratifications paradigm but at the same time provided an articulate statement of an encompassing functional theory to which the uses and gratifications paradigm could have attached itself. It is a bit of an irony that the social "theoretical" umbrella under which the uses and gratifications paradigm has claimed theoretical legitimacy (Katz, 1979) is regarded only as a "context of inquiry" (Merton, 1957), similarly to the view of uses and gratifications as only an approach to data gathering.

It should be noted, however, that incorrectly calling functional analysis a social theory, even a flexible social theory, does not get the uses and gratifications paradigm off the conservative hook. It merely suggests that we look elsewhere for an explanation of the nature of the conservative orien-

tation, because the actual application of the uses and gratifications paradigm has tended to result in extremely conservative conclusions about the potential for change. Elliot's (1974) criticisms of nearly ten years ago remain largely unanswered:

> No attempt is made to differentiate between media or people on the basis of the interests they represent or the power they possess; no analysis is made in terms of the functions and dysfunctions for different power groups and their ideologies. Dysfunctions, when they appear at all, tend to be negatively labeled phenomena which might prevent society (as a whole) from reaching its ideals, as for example the narcotizing dysfunction identified by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1957).

A relatively unique and still quoted example of the uses and gratifications paradigm as a useful approach to the study of social change is Mendelsohn's (1969, 1971) work in developing a series of television programs for low-income Mexican-American audiences. Mendelsohn (1974) describes the project:

> Working in concert directly with Mexican-American writers, directors and authors, the research team for this project conducted no fewer than twelve separate studies that were designed (1) to delineate a distinctive target audience (urbanized Mexican-Americans earning less than $5,000 yearly and manifesting above-average levels of anomie); (2) to assess important audience needs (e.g. the need for supportive messages designed to alleviate feelings of personal powerlessness); and (3) to determine patterns of media-related wants, uses and gratifications which might help to attract audiences who were unaccustomed to strictly informational mass media vehicles.

Questions the researchers neglected to ask included: Were the Mexican-Americans' perceptions of their personal powerlessness accurate from their point of view. For whom is the amelioration of these feelings of powerlessness functional and for whom is it dysfunctional? To what extent were the media-related wants, uses, and gratifications of this special audience conditioned by their history of experience with the media? And if they were conditioned, for whom were their particular orientations functional or dysfunctional?

The Conservative Bias of the Uses and Gratifications Paradigm: The Challenge of the Pluralist Theory of Democracy

In this section the following argument will be developed: The uses and gratifications paradigm is not atheoretical (even though "functionalism" has been refuted as its conceptual home). It can be usefully viewed as an implicit operationization of media effects study within a pluralistic conception of democracy. And while the pluralistic conception of democratic government is important, it is at the same time only a one-dimensional approach to the study of power in society. Consequently, the uses and gratifications paradigm is heir to this limiting conceptualization. In order to make these points it will be necessary to review the basic assumptions of pluralistic theory, consider the relationship between the uses and gratifications paradigm and these assumptions, examine the criticisms of the pluralistic approach and finally review the implications of these criticisms for the media paradigm.

Assumptions. Dahl (1969) offers an intuitive idea of the meaning of power from a pluralistic perspective: "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do." To this definition, Polsby (1963) adds, a study of power may be made by analyzing "who participates, who gains and loses, and who prevails in decision-making." The key to this approach is its focus on political behavior and consequently on the belief that the exercise of power is overt and therefore observable. It is assumed that grievances are readily recognizable and acted upon. A second assumption is that participation "occurs within decision-making arenas, which are in turn assumed to be open to virtually any organized group" (Gaventa, 1980). Conflict, therefore, will be observable in these open arenas, expressed as policy preferences carried into the decision-making process through political participation (Lukes, 1974).

Uses and Gratifications Paradigm. The paradigm fits neatly under the umbrella of pluralistic theory in two ways: in terms of the several roles to be played by media institutions and in terms of the conceptualization of the audience/citizen. As an institution, the media are seen both as pluralistic interest groups in their own right and as tools promoting and maintaining other such groups by aiding in the process of political socialization and the provision of information (Kraus and Davis, 1976). Therefore the media are assumed not only to make available the necessary range of viewpoints and information to allow an active audience to fashion world views appropriate to their needs, mobilize, and act, but also to keep before the public eye the significant decision-making agendas necessary to allow for public scrutiny. For instance, the close relationship between the organization of news gathering and the normatively defined points of political and social decision-making would appear to facilitate this task (Tuchman, 1978).

The paradigm's conceptualization of the active audience dovetails nicely with the pluralistic theory assumptions that people will act on recognized grievances, in an open system, for themselves (Gaventa, 1980). Pluralistic theory requires a rational, motivated, self-interested citizenry. The fact that non-participation is becoming a predominant fact of political life in the United States does not pose a significant problem given this perspective. Non-participation in the political area and similarly, acceptance of existing media fare, can be read as satisfaction.

Criticisms of Pluralistic Theory. The major criticism of pluralistic theory is not that it is wrong but that its definition of power is too narrow. Power, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) argue, has two faces:

> Of course power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B. Power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A. To the extent that A succeeds in doing this, B is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to A's set of preferences. (p.7)

The first face of power, then, is the "securing of compliance through the threat of sanctions" (Lukes, 1974). This is the visible face of power incorporated into the pluralistic perspective that operates through coercion, influence, authority, force, and manipulation within the decision-making arena.

The second face of power is much less visible and is exercised essentially through a process of non-decisionmaking. Non-decisionmaking, according to Bachrach and Baratz (1963), refers to the "means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or failing all these things, maimed or destroyed in the decision-implementing stage of the policy process" (p.44).

Westergaard (1979), in restating the criticism with particular reference to the media, suggests that the

> "liberal democratic theory of a pluralist form suffers from the same fundamental weakness in its ascription of critical responsibility to the media as it does in its larger denial of any durable concentration of power in western societies. It focuses on diversity of debate, critique and contest within set parameters, but it is indifferent to the existence and social shape of those parameters" (p. 101).

Relevance of Criticisms to the Uses and Gratifications Paradigm. Expanding our conceptualization of power to include its second face has important implications for the uses and gratifications paradigm. The disinterested role of media institutions in providing the symbolic raw material for an active audience to construct meaningful self-interested interpretations of reality must be severely redefined. The origins, nature and shape of the

media's symbolic offerings become critical questions which must be addressed in order to fully understand the meaning of the audience/media interaction. The emerging prominence of organizational studies of media production and distribution (Ettena and Whitney, 1982; Tuchman, 1978; Gitlin, 1980; Cantor, 1980; Guback, 1974) must be viewed as relevant to interpretation of audience uses of the mass media, qualifying the meaning of audience activity as operating within these commercially imposed boundaries on media content. In addition there must be a complimentary redirection of attention to the symbolic analysis of media content (Elliot, 1974; Carey and Kreiling, 1974; Swanson, 1977, 1979; Blumler, 1979; Windahl, 1981). it is clear however, that the models for content analysis available from traditional media effects research will not be adequate to this task. Shrinking the unit of analysis to a single action or character type, counting manifest demographic characteristics will not make visible the implicit ideological boundaries imposed by the existing structure of production and distribution. To uncover the ideological boundaries surrounding themes of power distribution and maintenance will require more subtlety. Work by Williams (1977), Garnham (1979), and Hall (1979) may help lead the way.

The Uses and Gratifications Paradigm and the Third Dimension of Power

Lukes (1974) has labeled the pluralistic conception of power a one-dimensional view because it focuses on behavior and observable conflict. The second face of power, presented by Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 1963, 1970), and Schattschneider (1960), he labels a two-dimensional view because "it incorporates into the analysis of power relations the question of control over the agenda of politics and the ways in which potential issues are kept out of the political process" (p. 21). However, Lukes (1974) still finds several conceptual deficiencies even in the extended position of the second view.

First, he criticizes the two-dimensional view as still too behaviorally oriented. The search for specific cases of non-decisions or exclusions presents a misleading view of the exercise of power. Decisions, whether to include or exclude, are "choices consciously and intentionally made by individuals between alternatives, whereas the bias of the system can be mobilized, recreated, and reinforced in ways that are neither consciously chosen nore the intended result of particular individuals' choices" (p.21). Furthermore, Lukes (1974) argues, the bias of a system is not maintained simply through the accumulation of individual acts, but also through the incorporation of a bias into the "socially structured and culturally patterned behavior of groups, and practices of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individuals' inaction" (p. 22). In addition, as discussed above, the strict behavioral orientation significantly limits the ability of the critical system observer to read the nature of that bias embedded in the cultural artifacts of the system.

The second criticism Lukes (1974) advances concerning the two-dimensional view is the continued emphasis of the pluralists on observable conflict. While the two-dimensional view of power represents an advance in sophistication by calling attention to the exercise of covert as opposed to overt conflict, Lukes (1974) argues that it still falls short of a complete conceptualization on two counts. The first is that for at least two types of power no conflict is directly observable--for instance, manipulation and authority where power is exercised as agreement based on reason (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970). The second is, as Lukes (1974) puts it,

> A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another to have the desires you want them to have -- that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires? (p. 23).

Even Dahl (1961) recognizes the importance of this phenomena but fails to explicitly incorporate it into his conception of power, largely due to his focus on actual conflict.

Lukes' (1978) third criticism of the two-dimensional view of power is related to the issue of observable conflict. Non-decisionmaking power is exercised only when a grievance is denied access as an issue into the political process. Lukes (1974) argues this implies that individuals who are unable to express their grievances in appropriate ways, directed at appropriate targets are consequently unharmed by the exercise of power. Furthermore, Lukes (1974) asks, since a central tenant in the exercise of power is to minimize the perception of grievances, that is, promote an acceptance of the existing situation, should it be so surprising that individuals may have difficulty recognizing the source of their grievances much less the nature of the grievance itself?

Implications for the Uses and Gratifications Paradigm. While the two-dimensional view of power implied a redefinition of the role of media institutions, the third dimension of power calls for a corresponding redefinition of the meaning of active in conceptualizing the audience. Just as the strictly behavioral orientation of the pluralist theory leads us to an overly narrow conception of the exercise of power, the behavioral orientation of the uses and gratifications paradigm, placing so much faith in the audience's ability to self-report the immediate as well as larger implications of their media orientations, over-emphasizes the degree of autonomy possessed by the audience. If as the second view of power suggests, the audience cannot see the subtle contours of their social and political environment, it is extremely

likely that their world views are correspondingly con- strained, in terms of their expectations, their desires and their behavior. Within the three-dimensional view of power, the uses and gratifications paradigm suggests the unusual possibility that we are confronting a situation where certain members of the audience are actively constructing a false or misleading view of the world. While this may seem a new proposition within the standard uses and gratifications paradigm, it is a century old idea to Marxist scholars.

In many respects Swanson's (1977, 1979) recent work arguing for a reconceptualization of audience activity to include the active construction of meaning has laid the groundwork for the introduction of the third dimension of power perspective into the uses and gratifications paradigm. What remained missing was a linkage of the process of meaning construction to a social and political inventory of the symbolic raw material available for interpretation. Blumler's (1979) concern regarding the contribution of social structural conditions to the development of specific audience needs and expectations represents a beginning in this direction. It must be recognized, however, that this concern for the manner in which specific material conditions contribute to the construction of meaning, the development of consciousness, has a rich intellectual history in marxist thought. What appears to hold the uses and gratifications paradigm from borrowing from this history has been its implicit adherence to the pluralistic conception of power and to a strictly empirical methodology. Hopefully, this paper, in making that implicit connection explicit, will lead media scholars to re-examine the validity of that conceptual home for the study of audience uses of the mass media. It would seem the frustration of researchers continuing the employ strictly empirical methods to the concept of audience activity, which is evolving theoretically to mean more than can be conventionally measured, will also stimulate

a re-examination of the uses and gratifications position.

The Three Views of Power and Implications for Research in the Uses and Gratifications Paradigm.

First Dimension. Since it has been argued that most research within the uses and gratifications paradigm has proceeded implicitly from the one-dimensional view, further research from this perspective would only be considered business as usual.

Second Dimension. The primary mechanism by which the second dimension of power is exercised is through the 'mobilization of bias'

> A set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures ('rules of the game') that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others. Those who benefit are placed in a preferred position to defend and promote their vested interests. (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970: p.43).

According to Bachrach and Baratz (1970), the mobilization of bias may be found operating through non-decisions in at least four ways: force, the threat of sanctions, directing attention to an existing bias within the political system to technically invalidate a threatening demand or incipient issue, and the strengthening of the existing mobilization of bias through the creation of new obstacles, symbolic or procedural, to hinder the efforts of challengers by delimiting the scope of the issue.

In terms of the uses and gratifications paradigm, then, research is required which will examine the institutional and elite actions which establish the public parameters of conflict and which will examine the symbolic content of those parameters. Recent attempts at the construction of transactional models of the mass communication process are steps in the right direction but they do not go far enough. Typically such models, while recognizing the importance of media content in determining media impact on even "active" audiences, do not call specific attention to the existence of realities alternative to the one presented, or to the forces responsible for its creation

and form. Conceptual bridges are required between the political science concept of agenda building and the mass communication concept of agenda setting (Hamilton and Brown, 1975), and between agenda setting and the uses and gratifications paradigm. Conceptual modification is also required. Agenda setting research must move away from the limiting notions of issue salience to issue framing. Tuchman's (1978) and Gitlin's (1980) work are suggestive of the conceptual types of content analysis and institutional/content interaction required to begin developing a fuller understanding of the nature and origin of the symbolic reality from which an "active" audience can construct their own reality.

Third Dimension. In many respects, the research challenges of the two-dimensional view of power are largely concerned with the recasting of the micro-process orientation of the uses and gratifications paradigm into a richer theoretical context. The challenge of the third dimension is more fundamental. If the audience is to be viewed as potentially not capable of speaking in their own best interest, in what way can an audience-oriented-research approach help to uncover this hypothesized dynamic of power? Two research fronts are suggested.

The first has already been incorporated into the research paradigm but requires refining in terms of the power perspective discussed here. More attention must be paid to the social-structural determinants of the audience's media needs and expectations, paying particular attention to the role the media itself has in shaping and conditioning those needs and expectations.

The existence of explicit connections between the range of media content available and the media demands expressed by the audience must be explored. The concept of accomodation must somehow be incorporated into this study to account for specific media expectations, based not on the media as a functional equivalent of other opportunities for satisfaction--which implies that other solutions actually exist--but as resignment to situations where other options are not perceived as available.

The second front requires a reversal of the current trend within the paradigm toward the conceptual reduction of media expectations to a few universal categories, a reversal which is consistent with the critiques of Carey and Kreiling (1974) and Swanson (1977, 1979). Attention must be devoted to the interpretation of the media expectations that audience members provide in order to understand the origin, meaning, and relationship of those expectations to their lives and to the dominant power structure within which those expectations are constructed.

If the uses and gratifications paradigm is to truly come to grips with the nature of the audience's media experience, it will have to give up the optimistic and simplistic notion that an active audience implies a powerful audience. It must be recognized that the concept of an active audience as traditionally explicated in the literature may in fact obscure the powerlessness of the audience. Certain audience media expectations are never voiced because they are perceived as inappropriate or as so unlikely as to make their articulation sound foolish or naive (see Bachrach and Baratz's (1970) rule of anticipated reaction). Other expectations, for some individuals, when expressed may be significantly modified or tempered due to the sense of powerlessness they feel with respect to the political and social system (Gaventa, 1980). In-depth probing of individual's media expectations may reveal more

about the assumptions these individuals hold regarding their location in the social and political system than about any true media needs. In-depth analysis of the meaning of a commonly expressed media expectation such as diversion may reveal the use of standard media fare not so much for polite relaxation but for opportunities to ridicule a presentation of reality which does not correspond to one's experiences as opposed to mediated life.

Uses and gratifications research is, as Windahl (1981) suggests, at a crossroads. The danger, however, appears that the paradigm will turn back in on itself rather than moving forward to explore the points of mutual concern with existing theoretical traditions.

Bibliography

Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. Power and poverty: theory and practice. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. Decisions and non-decisions: An analytical framework. American Political Science Review, 57, 1963.

Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. The two faces of power. American Political Science Review, 56, 1962.

Berelson, B., Lazarsfeld, P.F. and McPhee, W. Voting: A study of public opinion formation in a presidential campaign. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.

Blumler, J.G. The role of theory in uses and gratifications studies. Communication Research, 1979, 6, 9-36.

Blumler, J.G. The role of television in British politics. In H.J. Oyer (Ed.), Human communication: International and cross cultural implications. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1975.

Blumler, J.G. Mass media roles and reactions in the February election. In H.R. Penniman (Ed.), Britain at the polls: The parliamentary election of February, 1974. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1974.

Blumler, J.G. and McLeod, J.M. Communication and voter turnout in Britain. In T. Leggatt (Ed.), Sociological theory and survey research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974.

Cantor, M. Prime-time television: Content and control. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980.

Carey, J.W. and Kreiling, A.L. Popular culture and uses and gratifications: Notes toward an accomodation. In J.G. Blumler and E. Katz (Eds.), The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratifications research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974.

Dahl, R.A. The concept of power. In R. Bell, D.M. Edwards, R.H. Wagner (Eds.). Political power: A reader in theory and research. New York: Free Press, 1969.

Dahl, R. A. Who governs? Democracy and power in an American city. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.

DeFleur, M.L. and Ball-Rokeach, S. Theories of mass communication. New York: Longman, 1982.

Elliot, P. Uses and gratifications research: A critique and a sociological alternative. In J.G. Blumler and E. Katz (Eds.), The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives in gratifications research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974.

Ettema, James S. and D. Charles Whitney (Eds.) Individuals in Mass Media Organizations, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982.

Gans, H.J. The positive functions of poverty. American Journal of Sociology, September 1972.

Garnham, Nicholas. Contribution to a political economy of mass-communication. Media, Culture and Society I, 1979, pp. 123-146.

Gaventa, J. Power and powerlessness: Quiescence and rebellion in an Appalachian valley. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

Gitlin, T. The whole world is watching. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980.

Gitlin, T. Media sociology: The dominant paradigm. Theory and Society 6, 1978.

Golding, P. and Murdock, G. Theories of communication and theories of society. Communication Research 5, 3, July 1978.

Goode, W. Explorations in social theory. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Guback, Thomas. Film as International Business, Journal of Communication, 1974, 24:1, 90-102.

Hall, S. Culture, the media and the ideological effect. In J. Curran, M Gurevitch and J. Woollocott (Eds.), Mass communication and society, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979.

Herzog, H. What do we really know about daytime serial listeners? In P.F. Lazarsfeld and F.N. Stanton (Eds.), Radio Research 1942-43. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944.

Herzog, H. Professor quiz: A gratification study. In P.F. Lazarsfeld and F.N. Stanton (Eds.), Radio Research 1941. New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1942.

Hovland, C. Janis, J. and Kelley, H. Communication and persuasion. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954.

Katz, E. The uses of Becker, Blumler and Swanson. Communication Research, 1979, 6, 74-83.

Katz, E., Blumler, J.G., and Burevitch, M. Utilization of mass communication by the individual. In J.G. Blumler and E. Katz (Eds.), The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratifications research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974.

Kornhauser, W. The politics of mass society. New York: The Free Press, 1959.

Kraus, S. and Davis, D. The effects of mass communication on political behavior. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.

Lazarsfeld, P.F., Berelson, B. and Gaudet, H. The people's choice, New York: Columbia University Press, 1948.

Lukes, S. Power: A radical view. London: Macmillan, 1974.

McLeod, J.M. and L. Becker. The uses and gratifications approach. In D.D. Nimmo and K.R. Sanders (Eds.), Handbook of political communication. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981.

Mendelsohn, H. Some policy implications of the uses and gratifications paradigm. In J.G. Bumler and E. Katz (Eds.), The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratifications research. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974.

Mendelsohn, H. Caucion de la raza evaluated: Audiences' reactions to televised social-amelioration programming. Educational Broadcasting Review, 1971.

Mendelsohn, H. What to say to whom in social-amelioration programming. Educational Broadcasting Review, 1969.

Merton, R.K. Social theory and social structure. New York: Free Press, 1968.

Murdock, G. and Golding, P. "Capitalism, communication and class relations. In J. Curran, M. Gurevitch and J. Woollacott (Eds.), Mass communication and society. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979.

Parsons, Talcott, Sociological Theory and Modern Society. New York: Free Press, 1964.

Polsby, N. Community power and political theory. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.

Schattschneider, E.E. The semi-sovereign people: A realist's view of democracy in America. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960.

Stinchcombe, A. Constructing social theories. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1968.

Suchman, E. An invitation to music. In P.F. Lazarsfeld and F.N. Stantion (Eds.), Radio research 1941. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942.

Swanson, D.L. Political communication research and the uses and gratifications model: A critique. Communication Research, 1979, 6, 37-53.

Swanson, D.L. The uses and misuses of uses and gratifications. Human Communication Research, 1977, 3, 214-221.

Tuchman, G. Making news: A study in the construction of social reality. New York: Free Press, 1978.

Weiss, W. Review of the uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratifications research. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1976, 40, 132-42.

Wertergaard, J. Power, class and the media. In J. Curran, M. Gurevitch and J. Woollacott (Eds.). Mass communication and society, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979.

Williams, Raymond. Marxism and Literature, London: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Windahl, S. Uses and gratifications at the crossroads. In G. Cleveland Wilhoit and H. deBock (Eds.), Mass communication review yearbook, Vol. 2. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1981.

Wright, J. The dissent of the governed: Alienation and democracy in America. New York: Academic Press, 1976.